

# Teaching Academic Language:

## A Game Changer for Academic Achievement

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# Warm-up

- Introduce yourself to your neighbor and tell them something about your name.

My name is special because

\_\_\_\_\_.

I am named after \_\_\_\_\_.

One reason I like/don't like my name is

\_\_\_\_\_.

# Learning Targets

- I can identify the features of academic language in various content areas
- I can write language objectives that include **what** language needs to be taught for academic success

# Agenda

- 1 Describe academic language
- 2 Look at examples of academic language taught in classrooms
- 3 Learn about three features of academic language
- 4 Look at a model of how to write language targets (objectives)

# Defining academic language

- ▣ Write a definition/description in your own words
- ▣ Read a description by a scholar
- ▣ Share with partners

# Why is academic language challenging for students?

- ▣ Jot down some thoughts
- ▣ Share with a partner.

Academic language is challenging for students because \_\_\_\_\_.

The language my students have the most difficulty with is \_\_\_\_\_.

# A Review of the Literature on Teaching Academic English to English Language Learners

DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, and Rivera (2014)

- AE is the “medium through which **concepts and skills are learned and assessed**, and social relationships and identities are formed”
- as **academic content** becomes more abstract and **complex, language structures** become more **challenging**
- “The ways in which teachers, texts, and assessments use language to convey and test disciplinary knowledge **determine in large part the content students learn.**”

## Language is “hidden” (Christie, 1985)

- “Language is the ‘hidden curriculum’ of schooling; that is, the norms and patterns of language as it is used within and across academic disciplines is **never made explicit** to a large segment of the student population.”



# Let's take a look

- ▣ Video—3<sup>rd</sup> grade
- ▣ <http://elschools.org/node/36975>
- ▣ What do you notice about how language is being used in this classroom? Take notes
- ▣ Consider 4 language domains: Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening

# What does teaching language look like?

- Scaffolding student comprehension of complex text at grade level
- Providing models and supports to build increasingly more complex sentence structure and discourse patterns when writing
- Lots of student talk on academic topics with supports such as sentence frames
- On-going work with vocabulary, not only specific content vocabulary but Tier 2 words

# What teaching language should not look like...

- ❑ Isolated grammar instruction
- ❑ Teaching vocabulary that is not connected to content
- ❑ Correcting all students' errors
- ❑ Teaching every student the same language in the same way
- ❑ Teacher talking more than the students
- ❑ Students using “adapted” and below grade level texts

# Why ELLs are not learning AL:

- Many teachers **shelter ELLs** from the types of interactions needed for academic language development.
- Teachers **accept responses without challenging** students to elaborate.
- **Open-ended questions**, although requiring more academic thinking and use of AE, were typically **directed at the English proficient students** in the class rather than the ELLs.

Verplaetse (2008)

# What are the linguistic features of AL?

1. Academic vocabulary
2. Syntactic or grammatical (complexity of sentences)
3. Organizational or discourse level (business letter, narrative, science article, conversation)

	Performance Criteria	Features
<b>Discourse Level</b>	<b>Linguistic Complexity</b> <i>(Quantity and variety of oral and written text)</i>	Amount of speech/written text Structure of speech/written text Density of speech/written text Organization and cohesion of ideas Variety of sentence types
<b>Sentence Level</b>	<b>Language Forms and Conventions</b> <i>(Types, array, and use of language structures)</i>	Types and variety of grammatical structures Conventions, mechanics, and fluency Match of language forms to purpose/perspective
<b>Word/Phrase Level</b>	<b>Vocabulary Usage</b> <i>(Specificity of word or phrase choice)</i>	General, specific, and technical language Multiple meanings of words and phrases Formulaic and idiomatic expressions Nuances and shades of meaning Collocations

The sociocultural contexts for language use involve the interaction between the student and the language environment, encompassing the...

- Register
- Genre/Text type
- Topic
- Task/Situation

# Features of Academic Language in WIDA

# Academic Vocabulary

Content-specific vocabulary is more often explicitly taught.

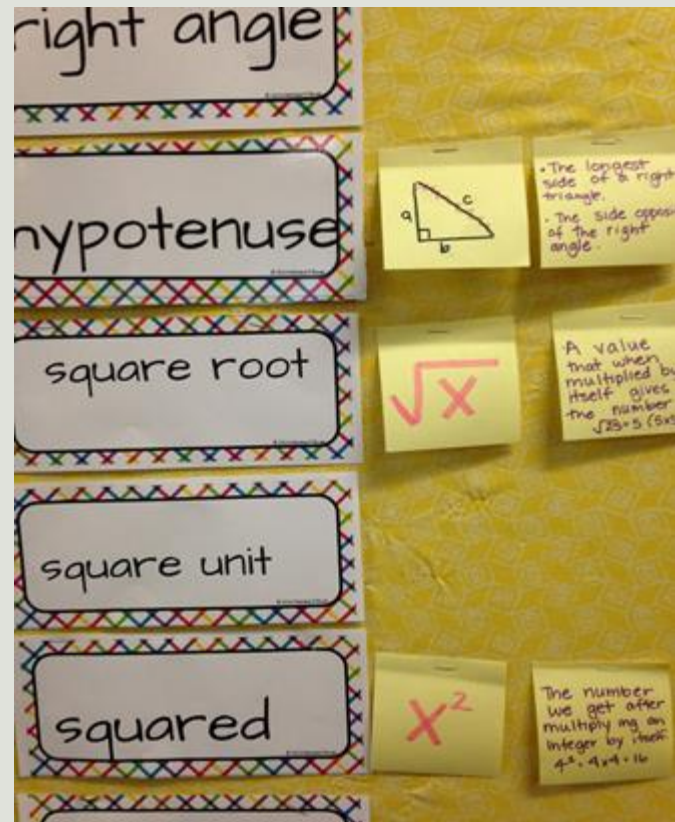
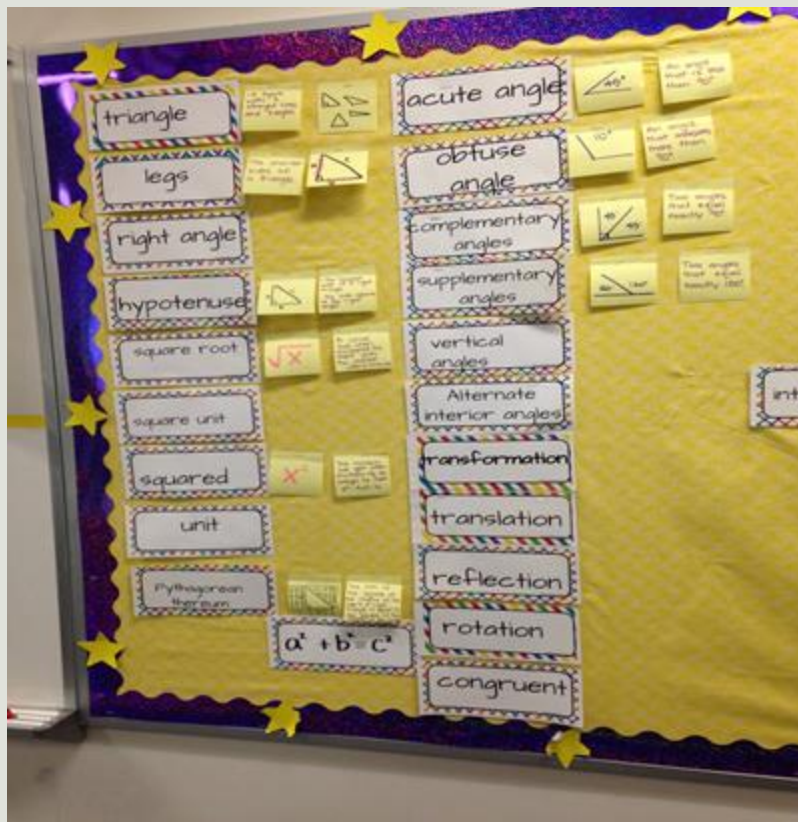
Ensure that Tier 2 words are being taught in context.

Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3
house	explain	cylinder
family	context	emancipation
grass	account	isotope
walk	amble	legislate

# Coxhead academic vocab list

- Coxhead compiled a list of 570 word families common to a wide range of academic texts encountered by university students
- <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/lals/resources/academicwordlist/awl-headwords>





# Interactive Word Wall

Tori Moroney (EL Specialist) and Meg Rowe (9<sup>th</sup> gr Math) at South Junior High

# Grammar: how language is used to accomplish a goal

- “A dynamic system of linguistic choices that students learn to use to accomplish a wide variety of social, academic, and political goals in and out of school”

(Gebhard, Harman, & Seger, 2007)

# Grammar affects meaning--Math

Exit Ticket: Describe the relationship between the volume of a cone and the volume of a cylinder.

Next day's warm-up: Three student responses are presented for revision.

**Can you add anything to make this answer more specific?**

“Three volumes of a cone would fill a cylinder.”

“The cone is one third of the cylinder. They both have the same radius and height.”

## Discussion Template Example

The transformation on my graph is a

\_\_\_\_\_

The two shapes are \_\_\_\_\_

I know this because...

Follow with a written exercise aiming to use  
the same language as the discussion

## Sentence Frames in math

Moroney and Rowe (South Junior High)

Dear Miss Moroney and Miss Rowe,

This is proof that I did my homework. =D  
What is the Pythagorean Theorem you ask?  
(I mean you really asked, literally) The theory is  
that you can add or subtract 2 side lengths  
of a right angle triangle. To start off, we  
need side lengths, or at least terms. The two  
shorter sides are the "legs". The Legs  
can also be represented as " $a^2$ " and " $b^2$ ". The  
legs all make up the  $90^\circ$  angle. The long  
side is known as the hypotenuse, also known  
as " $c$ ". Now that we have that out of way,  
we can start the theory. Let's say that " $c$ " is  
missing. We know that " $a$ " is 3, and " $b$ " is 4.  
 $3^2$  would be 9.  $4^2$  would be the area,  $4^2$  is 16. 16 is the  
area as well.  $9 + 16$  is equal to 25. 25 is now the  
area of  $c$ . But we need a side length. To achieve  
that, we must square root 25. Square rooting will  
give the side length, that is, 5. And 5 is correct.  
In order to find the side length of a leg, (ask)  
The only distance is to subtract the greater  
side length to the other. Other than that, the  
process is the same. Well, I guess that is it.  
I Hope. Anyway, that will be all.  
"And that's all I have to say about this,"  
Love Rose

Dear Miss Moroney & Miss Rowe,

In Class we are learning about the Pythagorean  
theorem. I'd like to try my best to explain it to you.  
So the Pythagorean theorem only works on right  
triangles. On a right triangle there is always 3  
sides. 2 legs and 1 hypotenuse. the 2 legs are  
labeled as A and B are are the shorter sides  
of the triangle. The hypotenuse is always labeled  
as C and is the longest side of the triangle.  
The first thing you need to do is find  
the area of the squares for the two legs, to do  
so you just square the length of the legs.  
Once you find the area of the squares for the legs,  
add the two areas together, this gives you the  
square area for the hypotenuse. Next thing you  
need to do is square root the area of the  
hypotenuse. This number represents the length of  
the hypotenuse line for your right triangle.

~ Love Rose ~

# Math discourse: letters

Moroney and Rowe (South Junior High)

# Noticing the “language” of content areas

■ Talk about a cell phone from the perspective of:

1. Poet

2. Mathematician

3. Historian

4. Scientist

Have your partner write down some of the language you used.

Why? In order to teach language you need to recognize it.



What are the **functions** of language?

- ▣ How language is used for a specific **communicative purpose**

# What language matches the language function?

Functions: describe, request, persuade, complain

Vocabulary:

Syntax:

Complexity of discourse:



# Language functions in content

- **Science:** explanation, description, comparison, writing a report of an experiment
- **Mathematics:** Symbolization and representation, explanation, argumentation, description, and comparison/contrast
- **History/Social Studies:** sequential, chronological, cause/effect, explanation, justification, generalization
- **Language Arts:** Interpretation, analysis, evaluation, explanation, and description

# Examples of language targets

- Students will use comparisons with adjectives (e.g. the most significant event, more obstacles than..., ) in order to compare events during the Civil War.
- Students will use complex sentences using conjunctions (e.g. because) to justify building features designed to reduce impact on the environment.
- I can compare the size of two objects using comparative adjectives: taller, shorter, larger, smaller.

# Writing language targets/objectives

- What is the **purpose** of the work, task or product?
- How will students **process and produce** language?
- Which **features** of discourse, sentences, or words/expressions are key to processing or producing language in this context?
- What are the **most important uses** of academic language in this lesson?

# Formula (Kinsella and Singer, 2011)

Students will \_\_\_\_\_  
(language function)

\_\_\_\_\_ (content)

using \_\_\_\_\_.  
(language tools—structures, vocab, ...)

# Example language target

3<sup>rd</sup> grade video:

Students will justify the main idea of an excerpt from The Butterfly in Magnolia Circle using relevant details from the text and complete sentences.

key vocabulary: main idea, detail, because, reason

I think \_\_\_\_\_ is the main idea because \_\_\_\_\_.

I determined that \_\_\_\_\_ is the main idea because I found \_\_\_\_ details to support it. They are....

# Language targets

- Examples from Kinsella and Singer (2011), See link on next slide
- Match the content target to the language target.
- The language target will support students to reach the content target while developing their academic language.

# Resources

Linguistic Scaffolds for Writing Effective Language Objectives (Kinsella and Singer, 2011)

<https://www.scoe.org/files/kinsella-handouts.pdf>

Academic Language Functions: Toolkit

<http://www.htsb.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Academic-Language-Functions-toolkit.pdf>

# Promoting Oral language

- Conversation starters; prompts; on table tents, laminated copies, posters, flip books etc.
- Structured pair and group work—Be specific, guide, limit time
- Structured group dialogue—Socratic Seminars
- Stick pick app: pulls student name and has question prompts, sentence starters, and thinking levels



# Power of AL: Student response to Socratic Seminar

- “We did one of our seminars on “Wife of Bath’s Tale”. I can say I learned a lot of things. It was a great experience for me because I understand the story much better and the question that were asked were really good and I got to hear everyone's opinion on them. I also learned to be courageous in presenting my own thoughts and reasoning, but be flexible and willing to change my mind in the face of new and compelling evidence. I learned how to communicate better with others. I could also say that I had a lot of skill improvement. I don't talk much because I think my English is not good enough, but during the seminar I tried to talk and give my opinion as much as I could. **It felt like I had power in my hands.** I can say that I improve my talking skill and also I wasn't scared of talking and arguing as much as I was.”

(ELL high school student, Twin Falls SD)

# Resources

**Jeff Zwiers** Academic Language and Literacy

<http://www.jeffzwiers.org/tools--resources.html>

- ▣ Visual tool for Identifying Language demands to Create language Objectives
- ▣ Many additional resources and links on this page

# Resources

- Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit (2014) Academic Language in Diverse Classrooms: Promoting Content and Language Learning

Series of books with unit plans in Language Arts or Mathematics at different grade levels: k-2, 3-5, 6-8

- **DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, and Rivera.** *A Review of the Literature on Teaching Academic English to English Language Learners.* Review of Educational Research September 2014, Vol. 84, No. 3, pp. 446–482.

# Webinar, On-line course

- **TESOL webinar on Words and Deeds: Understanding and Teaching Academic Language to ELL, May 27, 2015**
- <http://www.tesol.org/events-landing-page/2015/01/23/words-and-deeds-understanding-and-teaching-academic-language-to-ells>
- **Understanding Language Language, Literacy, and Learning in the Content Areas**  
<http://ell.stanford.edu/>